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SUBJECT: VATICAN ANTI-TIP CONFERENCE: NIGERIAN ROLE?

REF: VATICAN 00700

1. Post read reftel with interest and applauds Embassy Vatican's initiative in organizing an international conference on Trafficking in Persons (TIP) in collaboration with the Vatican Secretariat, G/TIP and PD/IIP.

2. We would like to suggest that the issue of Nigerian trafficking be included in the conference agenda. Italy is the largest destination for women and girls trafficked from Nigeria for sexual exploitation in Europe. An estimated 18-20,000 Nigerian women and girls are currently in a trafficked situation in Italy. The Italian government has embarked on a program of assistance (estimated at \$4 million) to improve law enforcement efforts against the traffickers behind this trade and to help efforts to repatriate and reintegrate rescued TIP victims. (Note. On March 1 the Italian government repatriated 156 Nigerian girls and women to Lagos aboard two chartered aircraft. End Note.) Post discusses this issue regularly with the Italian Ambassador to Nigeria, who desires greater U.S.-Italian collaboration on anti-TIP efforts. G/TIP officers are aware of late 2000 bilateral discussions in Washington on this initiative, which we would like to see advanced.

3. In addition, CARITAS and Catholic NGO Community Pope John XXIII are involved in addressing the Nigeria-to-Italy TIP problem. In February 2001 the Nigerian NGO "WOTCLEF (Women Trafficking and Child Labor Eradication Foundation)" led by its founder, the wife of the Nigerian Vice-President, hosted a regional TIP conference at which the President of Community Pope John XXIII, Don Oreste Benzi, spoke on the NGO's efforts to assist with the rescue and repatriation of Nigerian girls and women trafficked to Italy.

4. We would appreciate Embassy Vatican's consideration of the Nigerian TIP issue as an agenda item in the upcoming May conference. Also, if appropriate, conference organizers might consider inviting a Government of Nigeria representative, particularly Michael Mku, President Obasanjo's Special Assistant for Trafficking in Persons and Child Labor.
Jeter